Near Murfreesboro Sept 6th 1864

Mrs Maria Weston Chapman

My dear Madam

If you will excuse the use of foolscap paper, on the ground that down here, where devastating war, has left but the vestegies of civilization, we have no other kind, I will presume upon your kindness so much as to address you a letter. In doing this I shall more comply with the urgent request of my friend, to whom I am indebted for knowing you, than I gratify my desire to know more of one whose short acquaintance so favorably impressed me. To whatever extent the correspondence thus commenced may go, I feel that all the honor, & benefit will be mine, and the sacrifice yours.

And now having written this far I scarcely know how to proceede. If I were capable, this is not the time to indulge in philosophical speculations, or to discuss theories of ethics, or even social relations. The times are too full of stern realities for that, and I am & have been too much of the events which, like the tornados sweep, or the earth-quakes tread, have uprooted old ideas, & demolished old systems, to have time or inclination to speculate or theorize. There are many things which are new to me, that are old & familiar to you. Or rather perhaps I should say there are many new views of things to me which views you have always had. For instance there is the subject of negro slavery which you have always known and felt to be a wrong - a crime, which has but lately appeared to me in that light. I never perhaps would have agreed at any time that it was right - a good per se, but until recently

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I did not recognize it as a crime - a great wrong per se. It seems strange to me now that I lived so long so morally obtuse. I feel humiliated that the fact is that way.

And on this subject I meet with strange revelation almost every day, in conversation with persons. Mrs. Bowers may have said to you that she has always been an abolitionist, from her earliest recollection, and I have no doubt of the entire truth of the statement for she is the soul of truth and sincerity, and yet I never heard it till within the last three years. Last Sunday I was in conversation with a gentleman who owned three years ago 60 slaves. I remarked to him that I was surprised at myself for ever having looked upon property in a human being with toleration. He replyed. "I never did regard it in any other light than wrong, and it has given me more trouble than all other subjects." And almost daily I am hearing made to me such declarations. There are strange facts, but you will admit they are rather hopefull ones. They indicate the existance, & coming forth of a principle for the reorganization of society in this war-desolated land.

But what shall become of the negro? And what shall be his social & political status? I confess are questions of very serious practical import. He is a very much degraded being - very ignorant - very vicious, and the object of the most inveterate prejudices. Deserving the white man's pity, compassion, & benevolent care, very few who come in contact with him, no matter what may have been their opinions, or associations, treat him with common justice. Numbers who employ him in his quasi state of freedom, pay

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his wages perhaps as appeal upon, but pure encouragement in virtues ways either by precept or example. While too many use him still as did his grandsons owners, to administer to their love of gain, or to promote their pleasures or gratify their lusts. There are mortifying and humiliating facts, and perplex the question What is to be the future of the poor negro? There seems to me to open a wide field for benevolent exertion.

We have just had ten days alarm on account of a large rebel invasion threatening Gen. Sherman's rear & communications. It was under command of Gen. Forrest whom I Seneca when a boy, and whose only distinction before the war was that he was a successful negro-trader. The petty effort only destroyed one road, but failed to reach the main one - the Nashville & Chatanooga - the one on which we are.

Mr. Follen is in pretty good health. Mrs. Bowen returned in better health than she had enjoyed in 20 years, thanks to your New England air. She remained with us ten days but is now at our place, 45 miles distant with which we have no mail communication - I am expecting her every day. Were she present she would join me in kindest regards to you. The memory of your kind attentions will ever be cherished by us. Indeed we shall ever remember pleasantly our visit to New England.

Receive these very hastily written lines as an acknowledgement of our appreciation of the pleasure your acquaintance afforded us in Boston

Very truly your friend
John W. Bowen

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